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ABSTRACT

Through joint efforts that included Federal funds, school staff, and community members, Leflore County schools in rural Mississippi have made advances in education. The uses of instructional materials and media are described in this 1969 document, along with areas where deficiencies are found. One section cites specific findings with respect to the audiovisual aids program. Some recommendations given in the report are that (1) overall curriculum coordinators are needed, (2) the social sciences and language arts need curriculum renovation and renewed emphasis, (3) an overall plan for coordination of the acquisition and services of learning resources be developed, (4) more teacher involvement in curricular problems and planning be implemented, and (5) inservice education programs for teachers be launched. This document was prepared under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. (AN)

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Instructional Materials and Media

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INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND MEDIA IN LEFLORE COUNTY SCHOOLS

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The schools of Leflore County have shown consistent improvement over the last decade. A limited amount of financial resources were available for the purchase of modern educational technology to supplement the instructional program at all levels. The advent of federal programs for school support at the local level has had its effect. Large sums of money have been made available under the National Defense Education Act (1958) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965).

Teachers and staff have become more aware of the importance of supplemental aids in instruction; steps have been taken to see that the school children of the county have available to them the best items that can be purchased (always under financial restriction).

Local school reorganizations of a few years ago have produced several benefits, among them larger schools in which a supervising principal can be employed. A major step toward increased excellence depends upon principals who can and will assume the responsibility for over-all curriculum organization and revision.

Increasingly, teachers have invested more of their own resources for additional study and professional training. On the average, teachers are at a higher level of preparatory competence than ever before. Increasingly, too, younger teachers have taken their stand, and have chosen to practice

their profession in their home county. The teaching staffs have never been so alert to the problems of education in Leflore County.

But then, the educational problems in Leflore County schools have never been so acute. The problems of a rapidly changing economic system, out-migration from the county of young able-bodied persons, the quick decline in occupational opportunities for those with marginal training and education, the destruction in the quality of family life among rural Negro families, all combine to present problems of a magnitude never before faced in Leflore County. While many of the problems are not now the formal responsibility of the schools, their solutions are surely educational in nature. To paraphrase H. G. Wells, the future for most of the citizens of Leflore County rests on the result of a race between education and catastrophe.

FINDINGS

All those consulted as a part of this portion of the study were most anxious to help, to provide information, and to assist in the discovery of significant problems related to the purpose of the study. Information was freely given where information was available. There was a professional attitude about the inquiry and problem-solving related to this study.

Positive Findings

There are many findings of a positive nature in this study. The history is well-documented with the advances

in education made in Leflore County schools during the past two decades. Some of these improvements are due to the recent availability of federal funds, others are due to the efforts of the professional staff of the schools, and to the tax payers and patrons of the county schools.

1. Reduced Pupil-Teacher Ratios. The availability of federal monies under Title I has produced some outstanding benefits. First, additional teachers have been hired to serve in target schools, where the need has perhaps been the greatest. Out-migration has reduced school populations, in some cases, thus easing the burdens on the schools. More nearly individualized instruction now is possible due to the lower ratio. Learners with the most seriously deprived backgrounds now get additional attention not before possible.

2. Improved Attendance. Utilization of several new techniques has improved attendance ratios. First of importance has been the deployment of Home Visitors to visit and counsel with parents within the home. These visits, and the subsequent change in parental attitudes, have had the effect of keeping some youngsters in school more regularly, and for longer periods. The increased development of advanced agriculture, too, has had the effect of lessening the economic incentives for keeping school-age workers at home. Regardless of ultimate causes, the continued presence of youngsters in school has raised Average Daily Attendance ratios, thus assuring additional state financial assistance. The effect on the learners is less readily discernible, but their continued

attendance and the cumulative and sequential advantages thereof must be of major importance.

3. Health Services. Health Services are now available on a sustained basis in all schools in the county system. These advantages are significant in identifying illnesses and other potential reasons for school absence.

4. Supervising Principals. Consolidation of many isolated, rural schools into larger attendance areas has made it possible to assign full-time supervising principals. Adequate curriculum development and implementation cannot be expected until principals have time for this function. Indeed, a major cause for enthusiasm in the entire study is based upon the apparent quality of those who have been assigned to the principalship.

5. Full-time Librarians. Another major step toward a new level of excellence in education in the county is the establishment of full-time librarians in all of the elementary schools (they already existed in the secondary schools). An adequate educational program cannot be conducted without substantial facilities for the storage and use of instructional materials, audio-visual equipment, and related reference books and library holdings. With these facilities must come competent, trained, and dedicated librarians. Facilities and supplies deteriorate rapidly unless under professional supervision.

6. New Libraries. A massive forward step has been taken with the building of new library wings at all of the major

instructional locations. These have been professionally designed and tastefully decorated. Such facilities cannot help but make their contribution to encouraging better levels of academic interest and performance among the students.

7. Full-time Counselors. The schools are to be commended for the acquisition of full-time counselors for all of the secondary schools. Having these services available to all junior high school youngsters is a big step forward. The job yet remains to provide guidance services to the children of the elementary schools.

8. Significant Curriculum Additions. Within the last ten years, several significant additions have been made to the curriculum. The Modern Math has been introduced throughout the grades, with particular emphasis on a revision of the mathematics curriculum in the elementary schools. Two other additions have been within the elementary school curriculum: a new science program (AAAS) introduced this year, as well as an introduction to"the world of work" through the new curriculum in Arts and Crafts. This new emphasis on occupational education in the elementary school is to be commended, as is the strong vocational education program in operation at Amanda Elzy High School.

Negative Findings

While there is much to commend about the management and operation of the schools in Leflore County, all is not roses. There are spots of deficiency which were noted during the

course of the study which should be mentioned:

1. There appears to be no organized program of art instruction in the secondary schools. As man does not live by bread alone, additional attention should be paid to this portion of the aesthetics. Youngsters are being cheated by ignoring this dimension of the full life.

2. Attention to (and programs for) those with physical or mental impairment is woefully deficient. Every child should have the opportunity to attend an instructional program geared to his learning capacity. Perhaps in cooperation with adjacent school districts, sufficient numbers of children with special learning disabilities can be identified and provided for.

3. There is no continuous program for the provision of Early Education experiences. Socio-economic and cultural deprivation are so significant in this county that extraordinary provisions should be made to assist youngsters get an adequate start in school.

4. The beginning reading program has too narrow an emphasis on phonics. Indeed, the program has a heavy emphasis on reading in the early grades with no broad focus on language arts and language experience approaches. There appears to be little coordination of reading instruction in the elementary grades with language arts-reading activities in the secondary school. Actually, there is little reading instruction beyond the elementary grades.

5. There is little guidance and counseling available to youngsters in the elementary schools. Certain problems of personality and emotional development are much easier to handle when identified early.

6. There is no actual on-the-job educational operation available to the youngsters enrolled in the vocational curriculum. Some excellent vocational educational experiences suffer because of the "artificiality" of the classroom program. If o-t-j programs could be made available in the building trades, in cooperation with local industry and the employment service, youngsters might have better opportunities for subsequent satisfactory employment.

7. The curriculum lacks coordination. Although the system is fortunate to have several excellent coordinators, each has limited responsibilities, each works in a too tightly prescribed manner and area. The course of study, in too many cases, appears to be the adopted text book, for there are almost no locally established courses of study and curriculum guides. (Arts and Crafts, K to 6 is an exception.)

The complaint frequently was heard in the field that "the coordinators spend too much time in central office administration, and too little time in classrooms with teachers." Indeed, it may be that job descriptions, and work in identifying and selecting instructional materials through various federal title programs, has emphasized central office responsibilities to the detriment of true curricular coordination.

8. There appears to be little coordination between library services and audio-visual education services. While each program seems to be operating successfully on its own, the benefits to teachers and pupils could be increased about three-fold by closer coordination. The school library should be the Instructional Materials Center, with all resources to enhance learning being serviced through these magnificent new facilities.

There never will be enough money for each teacher to have at her finger-tips all the resources for her teaching program that she would like. While certain aspects of the decentralization of the audio-visual aids have a sound basis, the principle cannot be supported financially. Since this is the case, some centralization at the local school level seems advisable. The library seems to be the logical place, since few schools in the county have an adequate amount of storage space for audio-visual equipment and the related supplies.

9. Librarians need more professional training. As rapidly as possible, librarians should continue their professional studies until they have reached professional certification. It is good that several librarians have some classroom teaching experience, but they need the library training if they are to continue to function in these roles. Especially, the librarians need additional professional training in the Instructional Materials Center concept. Indeed, it is essential that librarians have time for

10. There appears to be little coordination between the spending of local monies for library materials, for instructional materials and for instructional supplies, and the spending of monies for such items in federally funded programs. Again, coordination is lacking. If there are to be coordinators of each major part of the curriculum, then all spending of monies for instructional supplies in a given area should be done with their knowledge and consent.

11. There appears to have been a significant drop in the amount of local funds spent to acquire instructional materials and library books since the advent of E.S.E.A. While this phase of the study was done too hurriedly to acquire full data to support the above finding entirely, such appears to be the case. If so, then the children of the Leflore County schools have not received the full benefit of the federal programs. This diminished local effort denies the full value of educational opportunity to all.

AUDIO-VISUAL FINDINGS

The major circumstances related to the entire field of learning resources (audio-visual aids, library facilities and holdings, etc.) are on the whole favorable. Federal programs and local support have been combined to produce a significant level of aid to teachers and learners. The findings include:

1. Dedicated, enthusiastic, and resourceful personnel are assigned to coordination of these programs. An observer cannot help but be impressed with the rapid strides that have been taken in this area. The personnel are well-trained and insightful into their responsibilities. (Service is their middle-name!)

2. There is serious imbalance in the curriculum, and in the learning resources programs backing it up.

Interestingly enough, while there is no coordination in the social studies area (a most awesome neglect), the media holdings in this area are strong. The sciences and mathematics show the evidence of several years of active work and financial support. However, vocational education and guidance are poorly supported-- areas of most crucial importance to most of the youngsters of the county schools.

An analysis of the audio-visual holdings shows serious lack of emphasis in the following subject fields: art, foreign languages, home economics (and all phases of consumer education), mucis, health and physical education, language arts, reading, and literature.

Better balance needs to be attained in the total audio-visual holdings, to strengthen the over-all curriculum. Hopefully, a coordinator for the social studies can be secured to bolster this woefully weak part of the curriculum. In addition,

a broadened program in language arts-reading-literature should be established.

3. Teacher utilization of available learning resources is low. Approximately 725 16mm instructional films were available to teachers during the 1967-1968 school year. (An additional 140 were on order for the 1968-1969 school year.) In all, approximately 1535 films were requested during the last school year, for a year-long ratio of 2.11:1 of usage over holdings. This is extremely low utilization. In the better learning resources centers, a year-long ratio might be 10 to 40 to 1. It seems obvious that most of the films are idle most of the time.

However, there may be several explanations for this low ratio of utilization. Equipment may be difficult to set up or awkward to use. Several classrooms in the county cannot be darkened-- making film utilization impossible. Teachers may not have had enough time to plan adequately for the inclusion of films in their regular instructional program. The film holdings may not be relevant to the instructional purposes for certain teachers. Certain films may not have been available when a teacher wanted to use them. Teachers may be uncertain and ill at ease in the use of audio-visual equipment, since few have had any audio-visual education as a part of their professional preparation. The curriculum orientation may be excessively "bookish" and not easily adapted to a multimedia approach. (Or perhaps the teachers are excessively

"bookish" and are not easily adapted to a multi-media approach!)

4. Teacher utilization of media differs by school and by scholastic level. Careful utilization records, fortunately, have been kept during the last year or two on teacher requests and services provided. Several things are obvious after careful scrutiny of these records. In every school, there are some teachers who have used no audio-visual resources at all, while others use them very extensively. In general, the lowest levels of utilization are found in the secondary schools, and the highest levels are found in the elementary schools. Perhaps this is a result of selection of media, but it does not appear so. The purchase of 16 mm instructional films is almost equally balanced between those designated for elementary and those designated for secondary consumption. With the largest enrollments in the elementary years, the net result is a larger selection of materials available for secondary school utilization. The following tables illustrate the patterns of usage by school and by medium.

Table 1

TEACHER USAGE, BY SCHOOL, OF FILMSTRIPS, 1967-1968

Elementary Schools		Junior High Schools		High Schools	
Name	No. of Tchrs.# Avrg. for Yr.	Name	No. Avrg.	Name	No. Avrg.
Balkin (10)#	33.3	Balkin (15)#	15.3	L.C.H.S.*(9)#	6.4
Schlater (20)	23.3	Fleming (8)	7.7	Elzy (3)	2.0
Sunnyside (5)	13.0	Wilkes (14)	4.9		
Elzy (17)	8.7				
Itta Bena* (9)	6.4				
East (5)	6.2				
Fleming (14)	4.6				

\# Number of teachers using, not number of teachers in school.
* Itta Bena Elementary and Leflore County High School data mingled.

Table 2

TEACHER USAGE, BY SCHOOL, OF 16MM INSTRUCTIONAL FILMS, 1967-68

Elementary Schools			Junior High Schools			High Schools		
Name	No. of Tchrs #	Avrg. Used	Name	No. of Tchrs. #	Avrg. Used	Name	No. of Tchrs #	Avrg Used
Balkin	(9) #	24.7	Balkin	(9) #	10.6	L.C.H.S.	(16) *	13.2
Fleming	(12)	20.3	Wilkes	(3)	4.6	Elzy	(13)	10.0
Itta Bena*	(16)	13.2	Fleming	(6)	4.3			
Elzy	(19)	12.9						
Sunnyside	(7)	12.9						
Schlater	(17)	12.0						
East	(7)	7.0						

Number of teachers using, not total number of teachers in the school.
* Itta Bena Elementary and Leflore County High School data mingled.

5. Printed resources are unevenly distributed. Although impressive strides have been taken to provide modern, useful, and pleasingly attractive library facilities, the main reasons for a library suffer somewhat. The ratios of books-per-pupil are very low in almost every school in the county; in some, the ratio is shockingly low. Table 3 shows this information as of January 1, 1968. Of course, some improvements and additions have been made since then.

Table 3

LIBRARY RESOURCES, BY SCHOOL WITH BOOK-PER-PUPIL RATIOS

School	Enrollment	Total No. Books*	B-P-P-Ratio
Leflore Co. H.S.	410	15,484	37.8
Itta Bena Elem.	349	8,219	23.5
East Elementary	230	4,694	20.4
Amanda Elzy H.S.	1,213	13,077	10.9
Sunnyside	225	2,183	9.8
Sam Balkin	602	5,527	9.2
R. B. Schlater	704	4,409	6.3
Amanda Ezly Elem.	803	5,158	6.2
Wilkes	633	3,404	5.4
T.Y. Fleming	713	3,126	4.4
I.S. Rogers	702	2,734	3.9
County Totals	6,611	68,015	10.2

*January 1, 1968

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is hoped that these above indicated findings will not seem unduly negative. There are many fine things to acknowledge in the management and teaching in the schools in Leflore County; however, plans for the future seldom arise from laudatory efforts and casual scrutiny. Consolidation and synthesis of the before mentioned findings suggest several necessary approaches for more fruitful educational activity:

1. Over-all coordination of the curriculum-- both present and developmental-- is imperative.

2. The social sciences and the language arts need drastic curricular rennovation and renewed emphasis.

3. A plan for over-all coordination of the acquisition and services of learning resources must be developed.

4. A more direct program of teacher involvement in identification of curricular problems, in selection of relevant audio-visual aids (note: there appears to be little audio at the present time), and in the logistics and utilization of these resources should be implemented. There should be a Learning Resources Coordinator (a teacher) in every school to assist teacher-colleagues to make the appropriate media applications to instruction.

5. The ratio of local financial support for the purchase of learning resources should be increased sharply.

6. A massive in-service education program should be launched to bring teachers to a new level of insight and competence vis-a-vis the media of instruction. The level of learning resource support now is better than the level of teacher capability. Such an in-service education program should be a part of the paid school year-- even if an increase of 10 to 15 days is called for.

CONCLUSION

The programs of Audio-Visual Education and of Library Services in the Leflore County Schools have almost reached the threshold of excellence. Dramatic dividends in terms of increased learning by children and youth are in the offing. The necessary professional application of these media, within the context of the instructional program, is the sole remaining factor. Teachers, in the main, have not been prepared, either by professional study or temperament, for the sometimes frightening world of educational technology.

The child is born into a multi-media world; since his earliest days he has received stimulation, entertainment, even education, from these media. The classroom dare not be less capable of providing quality instruction. The Leflore County Schools have progressed about as far as money, materials, and ingenuity can take it; change has been wrought in the material. But the most massive, indeed, the most fundamental change must be made in the mind and spirit. Further curriculum improvement and change is almost solely dependent upon teacher change and improvement.